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Futurist says glass is half full

State's agricultural potential is 'limitless'

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Futurist Jim Carroll said that while people across the United States are beginning to look at the future as being a glass that is half empty, Iowans need to look at the growing need for agricultural goods as a positive thing.

"People are feeling battered and bruised in globalization," he said. "Everywhere everybody needs a resounding good look at the future."

Jim Carroll

He plans to discuss these positive elements during the keynote address at the Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce 88th Annual Luncheon Meeting Sept. 13, 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m., at the Crowne Plaza Five Seasons Hotel Ballroom.

"Global food production has to double in the next 40 years to keep up with population growth and industrialization," he said last week, adding that there is little new arable land. "The potential for U.S. – Iowa – farmers is huge."

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Iowa is the hub of ethanol production in the U.S., approximately 1.5 billion gallons of ethanol are produced and 530 million bushels of corn are utilized each year. In Iowa, there are currently 25 operational ethanol plants, seven that are under construction and nine being planned – and the Iowa Corn office estimates that by 2008, Iowa will be producing 2.5 billion gallons of ethanol.

"The potential of what is emerging is huge," he said.

Mr. Carroll added that he will also address the growing need for manufacturers and talent in the U.S., especially in Iowa, during the luncheon.

"There is a lot of opportunity for an area like Cedar Rapids," he said, adding that it is important for the city and its business leaders to get the right skills for the right groups.

"An increasing amount of stuff will not be produced overseas because the timeframe is too long. The supply chain is too long," he said. "The price differential does not make up for the time."

Mr. Carroll said now is the time for Iowa businesses to make a plan for the future.

"We should try to accomplish things in the world today; we have become a little bit dispirited with what has happened with globalization," he said, adding that Cedar Rapids needs to continue to try and draw businesses back into the region. "Communities need to have that spirit back again."

The biggest challenge that Cedar Rapids faces, however, is a skills crisis, he said.

"It's going to be difficult to get the right skills," he said, adding that nearly every job is becoming more specialized in its responsibilities.

Kirkwood Community College and a group of Corridor businesses have already taken on that first step by introducing a program this year designed to test the skill level of prospective employees and address the resulting educational gaps in today's workforce.

Skills Advantage, the result of a partnership among 16 Corridor businesses, will use the ACT WorkKeys job skills assessment system to evaluate workers' skills in researching, reading and mathematics. Applicants wishing to improve their scores can seek gap training from Kirkwood or another educational provider before retaking the assessment.

Lee Clancey, president and CEO of the Cedar Rapids Chamber, said she is looking forward to his speech and was glad that he accepted the chamber's invitation.

"I wanted a speaker who was very interesting, engaging and could give us some ideas for the future," she said.

The annual chamber event is sponsored by *The Edge Business Journal* and FPL Energy Duane Arnold Energy Center. **CBJ**